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POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

COMMENT

HERE IN CASS STREET

WE should like to pass on to our readers a more liberal share of the "life" of the POETRY office—to introduce them to our extremely varied callers, show them scraps of our still more varied correspondence, let them read our contradictory clippings. And if only the seal of confidence could be removed, we should make them laugh by printing a few of our "museum" features—poems so amusingly bad that we could not bear to send them back without making copies for preservation.

One day, for example, the arriving editor discovers, so to speak, a foundling on the door-step—a young poet from New York or Oklahoma who has started out to see the world with a few dollars in his pocket, and who must find some kind of a job in State Street or La Salle to keep him fed and housed, and to oil the wheels of his journey. Again, an elderly poet-adventurer appears fresh from prison, where he had been tangled up in some friend's attempt at counterfeiting—a lank starveling figure, the gaunt picture of despair, but offering, to the editor's surprise, two or three acceptable poems; and leaping alive, even to a smile, at the actual receipt of a check. Or, a rainy morning is brightened with color by the visit of two quite astonishingly superb English ladies—a poet and her sister—who are speeding through the town

with their uncle, Sir Kenneth Somebody, and who leave us *édition-de-luxe* books and Queen of Sheba memories.

Helen Hoyt once gave us a guest book—it was while she was still Helen Hoyt, two years before her bridal New Year's day of 1921, when she became Mrs. William Whittingham Lyman out in California and took up her abode in Berkeley. Let us look over its entries since Christmas, and pause a moment with a few of the visitors:

There are Henry Bellamann and Glenn Ward Dresbach just before the turn of the year. Southern poets both, the one from South Carolina and the other New Mexico: Mr. Bellamann a musician, as well as president of the Columbia Poetry Society; and Mr. Dresbach an efficiency expert—a rare talent for a poet!—who had been making copper efficacious at Tyrone. And with the new year comes Edward Sapir from Ottawa, where he has been gathering and translating French-Canadian folk-songs. And bluff, black-bearded Jo Davidson, sculptor of all the war-heroes, draws his inky portrait in the book. And little Winifred Bryher writes her slender name there—the quiet English girl-author who was even then on her way to New York to surprise her friends by marrying Robert McAlmon.

Sara Bard Field, the warrior-suffragette from California; and Nora Douglas Holt, the beautiful bronze-colored founder and editor of the new and interesting Negro organ, *Music and Poetry*—these two are neighbors in the book. A week later comes John Drinkwater, and at the

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end of March Franklin P. Adams, the St. Simeon Stylites of the New York *Tribune*. Next Clinton Masseck, now of Kansas, erstwhile a warrior in the most fiery battle-line of the Argonne. A few days later it is Nicolas Roerich, the big-brained, high-souled Russian painter and dreamer, whose pictures are a more vivid revelation than Lenin's politics; and whose poems—if we could get at them in the three or four books he has published, may be as full of color and vitality.

And so it goes. The correspondence is more full of contrasts, possibly, than the visitors. Bits of it come from remote corners of the earth, but most of it bears George Washington's familiar red portrait on the envelope. The editor is asked not only to criticize poems—that is an obvious and common request—but to advise about publishers, to prepare club programs; to write an article on Florence Kiper Frank or Haniel Long for the benefit of some college-student's thesis; to reveal the author of some wandering poem—usually an incredibly poor one; to save some hapless poet from starvation or get him out of jail; to pass judgment on some elaborate system of psycho-analysis, or on some meticulous questionnaire which is to reveal with mathematical accuracy the ability of students in a certain great university to judge poetry—a questionnaire which so befuddles the editor's brain that judging poetry becomes a madhouse dance. These are but a few of the demands put forth by acquisitive minds—sometimes of marvellous ingenuity, and still more marvel-

lous confidence in the editor's lavishness of time, interest and spirit to meet them.

The poets themselves are usually more reasonable than these questioners who are studying or writing about them. Of course now and then the ego flaps its wings and temperament becomes temper, but on the whole they are tolerant of the editor's short-comings and astonishingly patient during that too-long period which usually divides acceptance from publication. They are very different—these poets: one, an I. W. W. coal-miner; another, a bedridden invalid in New Zealand; number three, a fine lady in the smartest of smart sets; number four, a plantation Negro in Georgia; number five, a Syrian rug-dealer; number six, a live-wire reporter on the New York *Scald*; seven, a corporation lawyer; eight, a little crippled seamstress sewing and writing in a wheeled chair; nine, a lovely red-haired siren, the heroine of an hundred romances; ten, a lonely spinster, "inaccessible in her emotional desert; eleven, a half-mad starveling whose little gleam of genius may be extinguished by niggardly denial of light and air and food for body and soul; and twelve, fortune's favorite, whose gleam may be extinguished by the sheer mass and weight of his possessions and opportunities. And there are the married and the single, the too much married and too little, the much divorced and the undivorced, and the careless few who get on without any of these formalities.

In short, there are today five hundred and ninety-six

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names in POETRY's card-index of accepted poets; and a history, thrilling but never to be fully revealed, goes with each card. Nearly a score of nationalities are represented either directly or through immigration, and forty-one of our forty-eight states, besides the District of Columbia and Hawaii. One of the severest shocks of the editor's career is the discovery that Indiana is not among them. Are there no poets left in Riley's own state, the state where they were wont to foregather and go on pilgrimages? Or have the poets of Indiana, one and all, boycotted POETRY? Anyway, Indiana is missing from our list, along with Delaware, Idaho, North Dakota, Mississippi, North Carolina and Utah.

It's a long and crowded trail we have travelled these eight-and-a-half stirring years. H. M.

THE NEBRASKA LAUREATE

The legislature of the state of Nebraska has fitly honored its most conspicuous poet-citizen by appointing him Poet Laureate of the state. Mr. Neihardt earns this distinction not only by his artistic achievement in general, but also by the fact that, as the resolution puts it, he "has written a national epic wherein he has developed the mood of courage with which our pioneers explored and subdued our plains, and thus has inspired in Americans that love of the land and its heroes whereby great national traditions are built and perpetuated."